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The Expeditions of John Charles Fremont

John L. Allen

University of Connecticut

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The Expeditions of John Charles Fremont: Vol. III, Travels from 1848 to 1854. Edited by Mary Lee Spence. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. lxxxiii + 641 pp. \$37.50.

With the publication of this third volume in the Expeditions of John Charles Fremont series, a massive compilation and editing task begun in 1965 has come to an end. The first volume and accompanying map portfolio, published in 1970, dealt with Fremont's travels between 1838 and 1844, focusing on the first and second expeditions into the American West which secured his fame as an explorer. The second, published in 1973, was devoted to Fremont's third expedition, his participation in the Bear Flag Revolt and subsequent court martial. Finally, the present work covers

Fremont's travels between 1848 and 1854, encompassing the period of his disastrous fourth and inconclusive fifth western expeditions.

Like its predecessors, this volume consists largely of what the editor calls "the documents," including not only most of the relevant published material bearing on Fremont's travels but also a wealth of manuscript evidence which illuminates the man and his times. Chief among the previously published works included are the famous exchange between Fremont and Charles Wilkes (from the *Washington National Intelligencer*), excerpts from Fremont's *Memoirs* and from Solomon Nunes Carvalho's published account of the fifth expedition, and Fremont's *Geographical Memoir Upon Upper California* which many scholars feel represents the pinnacle of Fremont's achievements as a scientific explorer. The manuscript material consists largely of Fremont's correspondence with a wide range of people, including his wife, Jessie Benton Fremont, and his father-in-law, Senator Thomas Hart Benton. Each of the 283 documents is edited for consistency and is extensively annotated; the annotations occasionally exceed the document in length and are, virtually without exception, at least as valuable as the printing of the document itself. Finally, the editor has provided an excellent, scholarly introduction to the volume, in which she gives meaning to the documents and details Fremont's activities during the years 1848 to 1854.

There can be little question that John Charles Fremont was one of the most fascinating and "romantic" characters of the nineteenth century. From monumental successes on his first and second expeditions and a role of international historical significance on his third, he proceeded to an abysmal failure on his fourth and a somewhat pathetic attempt to restore his tarnished reputation on his fifth. Spence has, in this volume, dealt with this latter period in a fair and sympathetic manner and supplied new evidence bearing on the character of a man who, after over a century, remains an enigma. Volume III of *The Expedi-*

tions of John Charles Fremont, along with its companion volumes, will stand not only as a model of documentary editing but also as a thought-provoking collection which should stimulate increasing public and scholarly interest in Fremont the man and explorer.

JOHN L. ALLEN
Department of Geography
University of Connecticut